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ABSTRACT

Community development makes use of what is now called strategic thinking and strategic planning. One crucial step in this process is developing strategies (and the subsequent tactics). First, the community development practitioner must assess the situation thoughtfully, and find out what resources the community has available, what is achievable, and where the community stands in relation to the other parties involved. Second, a careful reading must be done of the community. Considerations include the community's history and style, availability of resources, political stature of a community, and the effect the strategy might have upon the community. Third, the community development practitioner must examine his or her won personal ideology and values. Fourth, the practitioner should adhere to the following principles about strategizing: the principle of least contest; do not give anyone the chance to delegitimize one's client; give others a chance to respond to your action or position before taking another round of action; give others a change to "save face"; build upon the strengths and skills of one's constituency; be sure the general public understands what you are doing; and the principle of equifinality. Finally, the practitioner must be aware of what he or she and the community are willing to do within the range of possibilities. (Contains 12 references.) (YLB)

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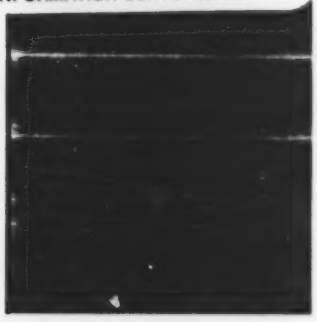

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TAKING ACTION: COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT STRATEGIES AND TACTICS

Despite variations among community developers on conceptual models or variations among communities on long-term goals, when problem situations arise, practitioners must work with people to devise strategies and tactics to meet the needs of the moment. "The type of direct action should fit the circumstances of the hour," is the way Biklin phrases it.[1] Saul Alinsky validated the notion that the practitioner should help people devise strategies and tactics that are consistent with intended outcomes. He also insisted that those affected by community conditions should design the remedy.[2]

By ***strategies*** I mean general courses of action with regard to means and ends, and by ***tactics*** I mean the specific acts used to implement the strategy. So, an overall strategy in a community development effort to clean up hazardous wastes might be to broaden public awareness about the issue; some tactics employed might be to air public service announcements, do a direct mailing, or stage gorilla theater of people keeling over on Main Street.

Community development makes use of what is now called strategic thinking and strategic planning. Persons or groups thinking strategically analyze a problem and figure out a route to follow in addressing it. In so doing, they scan the environment, assess the situation, precisely identify the issue, set a vision and goals, then develop strategies. Those steps are followed by implementing the strategies and evaluating the results. This monograph examines one crucial step in this process—developing strategies (and the subsequent tactics)—and examines that activity in an effort to identify some things community developers may not consider.

Selecting Strategies and Tactics

Assume that we are observing a low-income community—an unincorporated area outside the city limits—which has just found out that the county commissioners are set to grant a company a permit to

open a new animal rendering plant. The lure of increased tax revenue is leading the commissioners to overlook some negative environmental impacts of the plant. Let us further assume the community is relatively inexperienced in community problem-solving. Expected first reactions from the community might be frustration, anger, and feelings of helplessness. Hastily-adopted strategies may result that lean toward the lashing-out-in-anger variety. If carried through, they will likely engender a defensive and equally angry reaction, leading to a polarized situation.

Enter the community development practitioner. What might this person do differently? He or she would at least:

- Give thoughtful consideration to the situation
- Do a careful reading of the community
- Examine one's personal ideology and values
- Adhere to some principles about strategizing, and,
- Be aware of what s/he and the community are willing to do within the range of possibilities

The Situation

Giving thoughtful consideration to the situation means looking at where matters stand at the moment, what resources the community has available, what is achievable (or win-able), and where the community stands in relation to the other parties involved.

Where do matters stand at the moment? A CD practitioner doesn't want to help a community fashion a response that's out of proportion to the issue, not logically connected to it, or poorly timed. A very dramatic action (blocking off the street for a week) taken in response to a relatively minor issue (increasing accidents at a given intersection) can lead the public to question the community's sincerity. The general public shouldn't be left scratching its collective head, unable to see any connection between your actions and the issue. The good citizens of colonial Boston easily understood the link between dumping tea in the harbor and taxation without representation.

There's a temporal aspect to strategy selection as well. One can and should select a strategy on the basis of where the issue stands right now. Has it just surfaced and is barely acknowledged by most parties, or has it been widely debated and is nearing resolution, or somewhere in between? If the issue is a new one, early strategies probably should focus on alerting more people to the issue and developing a better understanding of it. If the issue has about run its course and is nearing resolution, strategies would tend toward whipping up one final burst of energy to take the final steps and positioning the community to deal with the pending outcome.

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What does the community want to get done is a key determinant in strategy selection. Biklin, for instance, asks of a strategy or tactic: "Does it educate."[3] Sometimes, just educating a particular party is all you hope to get done. Other times getting an institutional commitment to a new policy or program is the desired outcome. Still other outcomes might be: greater public awareness, dramatizing where everyone stands, forcing someone to acknowledge their position, or increasing active participation on the issue.

What's achievable must always be considered in fashioning strategies. Deciding what can be accomplished in a situation comes from understanding the issue and its effect on your community. The community that is knowledgeable about all aspects of an issue will be in a better position to choose appropriate strategies and tactics that are consistent with the desired outcome. There are times when you can sense the community's issue is a lost cause, but the community needs to put up some show of strength or it will lose credibility and won't learn anything from the experience. In other cases, perhaps the issue is just emerging, it's not fully understood, hard and fast positions haven't yet been taken, so it's still possible that the community might get everything it wants. In that case, the community might pull out all the stops and vigorously pursue its goal.

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Considering the situation entails deciding ***where the community stands in relation to other parties***. Roland Warren[4] draws a distinction among three kinds of situations. First is ***consensus*** where there is agreement on the issue by most parties. With a good chance that things can be resolved, the appropriate strategy is ***collaboration***. The challenge may simply be arranging a way to get the appropriate parties around the same table to talk through the issue. Second, Warren cites situations of ***difference*** where others don't yet agree on the points you're raising. Here the strategy is one of ***contest*** (whether in- or outside the bounds of accepted norms is an issue for later discussion), to win adherents to your point of view. Finally, there is ***dissensus***, where others don't even acknowledge your issue or flatly oppose your proposal. The strategy here is to conduct a ***campaign*** of education to show others why they should attend to what you're saying.

IF Situation	THEN General Strategy
Consensus ⇒ ⇒ ⇒	Collaboration
Difference ⇒ ⇒ ⇒	Contest
Dissensus ⇒ ⇒ ⇒	Campaign

The second factor to which careful consideration must be given in selecting strategies is the community or constituency with which the practitioner is working. For instance, is it ***urban or rural, large or small***? What works in the city (i.e., what is accepted as normal community action) won't necessarily work in the small town where that county commissioner you're

thinking of picketing is in line in front of you at the supermarket or is married to your cousin!

The Community or Constituency

A community may not initially be aware of exactly what resources it has, but careful reflection will likely reveal a greater depth and range of skills than community members or outsiders might have acknowledged.

One needs to understand the ***community's history and style***: is it active or passive, is it angry or complacent, has it dealt with this issue before or not? The angry, active community which has faced this issue before will likely be open to a broader range of action than the passive community which is a bit complacent and hasn't experienced this problem before.

The ***availability of resources*** in the community must always be considered. What money, information, manpower, political connections, etc. are on hand or can be readily developed? Some strategies clearly take more resources: pursuing a lengthy court battle vs. conducting a public awareness campaign call for vastly different amounts of money and skills. Some strategies call for frequent shows of community concern and strength: how many warm bodies can you turn out for public hearings? Another strategy, say negotiating, perhaps doesn't call for as many participants but does require very skilled leadership, with political sophistication. Is that available or at least being developed?

A community may not initially be aware of exactly what resources it has, but careful reflection will likely reveal a greater depth and range of skills than community members or outsiders might have acknowledged. John McKnight has developed an inventory of community capacities[5] using paper and pencil instruments that are easy to use for assessing both individual and organizational strengths. Just the experience of doing the assessment can be empowering to a community as it realizes it hasn't been giving itself proper credit. It's the job of the community developer to assist the community in doing some sort of assessment before it goes charging off in a direction where it might fail miserably.

Akin to resources of the type illustrated above is the ***political stature of a community***. Some communities are strong: they have many people willing to stand up and be counted, or they have a long track record of successes, or they have a reputation for doing their homework and knowing what they're talking about when they take a position, or their members are personally powerful (e.g., occupationally, educationally, financially). Obviously, others are weak on these dimensions. Strategy selection must be based on an accurate reading in this department or a community could find itself trying to do something it can't quite pull off. When a set of neighborhoods in one city boasted that it could demonstrate the regional transportation authority's plan was flawed, it did so with a bound report, complete with charts and graphs and even constructed three-dimensional models. Had it not produced such a polished presentation, its credibility for future episodes would have been reduced to zero.

McKnight's instruments are one way for a community to do a self-assessment, but political stature is a hard thing to measure. It's largely a

matter of how you are perceived: do people quake in their boots or laugh you off? Another approach might be to interview other community leaders, unconnected to this issue, for a neutral reading. Or, talking to some knowledgeable reporters might reveal a very different picture of your community than the one community members harbor. Any organization that's been around awhile has likely developed a rapport with public officials: What do these insiders report other public officials are saying about you? Community organizations that keep scrapbooks, photos, videos or other historical evidence about their past have an easier time remembering that they can get things done.

A final factor about the community to weigh is the ***effect the strategy might have upon the community***. A community needs to understand the risks associated with any strategy and balance those with the likely payoff. Burghardt cautions that the risks be understood and shared by everyone.[6] Some possible risks are: loss of face or credibility; time commitments that start stretching into infinity; legal actions, such as SLAPP lawsuits,[7] taken against leaders; alienating public officials whose support you'll need on some future issue; divisiveness within the community; or diminished resources (energy, funds, etc.). Possible payoffs from well-chosen strategies are essentially the converse of the risks.

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Personal Ideology and Values

It's very easy for community developers to forget about their own views of what is happening while working with a community. Practitioners can find themselves in situations where personal beliefs are being violated by what they're doing with the community. A common scenario is a practitioner who assumes residents are willing to take an adversarial position vis-a-vis public officials when, in fact, the residents are not willing to do that. As a professional change agent, the CD'er obviously has an agenda. It may focus on getting the problem solved, or engaging people in a process, or redistributing power.[8] The practitioner needs to "be in touch with one's feelings" about that agenda and how it fits what your client wants to accomplish. The practitioner who can't resolve serious differences between personal belief and a client's wants should consider disengaging.

Principles of Strategies and Tactics

Devising principles of strategizing and tactical selection is somewhat difficult because of the different basic approaches to CD.[9] However, I want to propose the following general principles.

First is the ***principle of least contest***, which means using the least confrontational strategy first, and upping the ante only as required, should the initial strategy fail. This allows you to counter any charge that you "should go through channels first." You can justifiably say, "We did, and they were clogged up!" In addition, as strategies get more confrontational, they also require more work and often more resources. So, try cooperating before contesting; try letter-writing before picketing. When you have

Polite Tactics

- **Petitions**
- **Testifying at public hearings**
- **Educational programs(e.g., leafleting, mass mailings)**
- **Letters to the editor**
- **Showing alternatives(e.g., preparing a counter plan)**
- **Press conferences or press releases**
- **Using the electoral process**

adhered to this principle and the ante gets upped, you can legitimately say it wasn't your decision to get tougher.

Second, ***don't give anyone the chance to de-legitimize your client***. People can be de-legitimized in a number of ways: not doing their homework and thus looking foolish; making absurd demands they know can't be delivered; being confrontational when it's unnecessary; claiming to speak for a community when they don't; and so on.

Third, ***give others a chance to respond to your action or position before taking another round of action***. Not to do so makes you look uncivilized and rude. That damages credibility. In addition, each action you take should be based upon the best and latest information, such as what others are doing. So, it's in your interest not to take a second move until the other party has taken its first move. (Of course, sometimes the other party's first move is NOT to move). People who are in motion politically may understandably be impatient and want to keep things moving. It's the CD'er's task to remind them of this principle, without appearing to be dumping cold water on their enthusiasm.

Fourth, it's equally vital to ***give others a chance to "save face."*** There's no reason to rub someone's face in their defeat, or even to get that personal. You might have to work *with* them next time around and therefore need to preserve that possible working relationship.

Fifth, in deciding what steps to take, one should always ***build upon the strengths and skills of one's constituency***. Saul Alinsky, though working strictly within the conflict paradigm, cautioned organizers never to go outside the experience of your people, but whenever possible, to go outside the experience of your adversary.[10] Maybe you personally marched down Main Street numerous times 25 years ago and feel that's a great tactic. If, however, your constituency regards that as impolite or would feel uncomfortable doing that, then you don't march. It's that simple. You do things people feel comfortable doing, or things that stretch them one small step at a time. As a community developer, you're interested in the growth of your community, not their embarrassment. If things become adversarial, then moving outside the experience of the other side can have the effect of embarrassing the adversary, throwing them off guard, putting them in the position of having to react and perhaps forcing them to risk blundering in public, thus giving your people a feeling of power. But you don't do that if that's outside the experience of your community.

Your actions are usually being watched by others—the general public who are not personally involved. Their evaluation of your position may be instrumental in determining the final outcome. Their opinions of your strategies and tactics should not be dismissed lightly. Principle six: ***be sure the general public understands what you're doing.*** Those on the sidelines may be potential allies, and the last thing you want to do is drive them into the arms of your opponents! Some on the sidelines can be regarded as innocents so don't injure them.[11]

A seventh principle to remember is the ***principle of equifinality*** - though most people haven't even heard of the word - namely, that between point A and point B there are an *infinite* number of lines besides the one straight line. In other words, no one strategy or tactic is all-important if you can imagine a number of ways to get the job done. So, when tactic A fails, Okay: there are still infinity minus one other tactics from which to choose. Sometimes one has to work hard to appreciate this, but one needs to take small delight in whatever small steps of progress are taken. The community developer, as cheerleader, at times has to be the one to remind people of what has indeed been accomplished even after a crushing setback. People, including the CD'er, need strokes, whenever and wherever they can get them. The CD practitioner has to be ready to dish them out.

Awareness of the Range of Possibilities

When it comes to tactics for community development, the possibilities range from polite to militant. The ***polite*** tactics are ones where you stick closely to the rules of political behavior everyone expects will be adhered to in this community. ***Assertive*** tactics are ones that use the rules to the fullest, pushing at the edges of what's locally acceptable. ***Militant*** tactics bend the rules or substitute new rules for the old ones. The distinct between what is polite and what is militant doesn't have anything to do with violence or legality. The issue is more about what is normal, accepted behavior in the political realm of the community at that time. What is seen as a safe and polite tactic in one community may be seen as wildly militant in another.

Tactics are the brainchild of creative, politically astute, and even whimsical minds. The possibilities are thus endless. New ones are being invented all the time.[12] (See sidebars on pages 6, 7, & 8.)

Summary

Strategizing and fashioning tactics in community development combines the creativity of the right brain with the analytic capacity of the left brain. Effective community developers, over time, develop a second sense about what's the right thing to do in a given circumstance. But being brilliant strategists and tacticians is not enough: we should also be facilitators and educators, concerned with helping our communities develop that same sense. Cultivating in residents a sense of "strategic creativity" about how to get things done is empowering as it unleashes their potential to create change. Next time they see a problem, right away they have some notion about how to approach it, combining the systematic analysis of the factors outlined here with their own native creativity.

Assertive Tactics

- **Negotiation, arbitration, mediation**
- **Legal actions, suits, injunctions, restraining orders**
- **Legal appeals**
- **Recalls, referenda, initiatives**
- **Strikes**
- **Marches, parades, rallies**
- **Exposés**
- **Pickets, vigils**
- **Renouncing honors(e.g., turning in your medals)**
- **"Sic the authorities on them" (e.g.,notifying the health, building, zoning, etc., inspectors about possible code violations in a bar you're trying to close down)**

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Militant Tactics

- **Confrontation**
- **Civil disobedience**
- **Embarrassment (e.g., dumping uncollected garbage on the lawn of the public works manager whose crew refuses to clean your neighborhood's alleys)**
- **Dramatizations**
- **Tax refusal**
- **Rent strikes**
- **Hounding (a crowd incessantly following some public official everywhere)**
- **Clog the system (e.g., each of a long line of folks deposits $1 at a redlining bank, then gets at the end of the line and withdraws it, then deposits it, etc....)**
- **Boycotts, economic sanctions**
- **Public fasting**
- **Accountability sessions (inviting someone to your meeting, putting him/her on the hot seat for interrogation and pressing for a signed commitment to act)**
- **Partial or general strike (passive resistance through staying away from work, downtown, school, etc.)**

Some specific practices community developers can begin if they take to heart the lessons of this paper:

1. Define your own favorite strategies and tactics, the ones *you've* always used, with or without success. This could be revealing if you've been employing some without being very conscious of your selections.

2. Critically - and without being too defensive - examine your choices in light of the ideas forwarded here. Better yet, do that critical examination in the company of some fellow practitioners. This could make a great in-service training session for CDS Chapters!

3. Suggest to community leaders that you conduct training sessions on strategies and tactics:
   - to identify the community's favorite ones
   - to assess how effective they've been
   - to define what's acceptable and what's not in the community
   - to create a new list of available strategies and tactics, etc.

4. Be sure to have debriefing sessions with the community after it has employed some particular strategy or tactic to evaluate what was done, why it worked, why it didn't, etc.

5. Put down in black and white what you (practitioner and community) are learning.

6. Share what you've learned with others in the community and within the profession

References

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[2] Alinsky, Saul D. 1971. Rules for Radicals. New York: Random House.

[3] Biklin, *op. cit.*

[4] Warren, Roland L. 1977. Social Change and Human Purpose: Toward Understanding and Action. Chicago: Rand McNally., pp. 126-142.

[5] McKnight, John. 1987. The Future of Low-Income Neighborhoods and the People Who Reside There: A Capacity-Oriented Strategy for Neighborhood Development. Evanston: Northwestern University Center for Urban Affairs and Policy Research.

[6] Burghardt, Steve. 1982. Organizing for Community Action. Beverly Hills, California: Sage., p. 23.

[7] SLAPP = Strategic Lawsuit Against Public Participation. These are legal actions commenced by private interest plaintiffs against individual persons, public interest groups, community organizations, or public officials, aimed at stifling public participation through intimidation.

[8] Rothman, Jack. 1974. Three models of community organization practice. Pp. 22-39 in Fred M. Cox, John L. Erlich, Jack Rothman, and John E. Tropman (eds.) Strategies of Community Organization. Itasca, Illinois: Peacock.

[9] Christenson, James A. and Robinson, Jerry W. Jr. (eds.) 1989. Community Development in Perspective. Ames, Iowa: Iowa State University.

[10] Alinsky, *op. cit.*

[11] Oppenheimer, Martin and Lakey, George. 1964. A Manual for Direct Action. Chicago: Quadrangle Books.

[12] For a good listing of some alternatives, see for example Altman, David G. et. al. 1992. Public Health Advocacy: Creating Community Change to Improve Health. Stanford University: Center for Research in Disease Prevention.

Resources you can use to expand your skills in developing strategies and tactics in community development.

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